

Not Interested

by Desaix

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Summary: Ranma discovers he has another fiancee... only this one seems to just not be interested...

Not Interested

Not Interested... by David A. Tatum

This has crossover elements with Maison Ikkoku, though a knowledge of that series is not required for you to enjoy this piece...

Disclaimer: These characters obviously do not belong to me, but I do ask of their creator, Rumiko Takahashi, and anyone else who owns the copyright on them, that they not sue me for what I feel is simple tribute to the fabulous world they have created. If you do decide to sue me, realize I'm a third year college student who is a journalism major and a creative writing minor- so I'm a broke kid with no real prospects for employment....

Author's Notes: This idea just came to me, and I HAD to write it out before I forgot it. And yes, I'm still on sabbatical from working on Return of the Sisters. Expect me to write at least two more shorter fics like this one before I get back to work on it...

Chronological Note (For those who don't like to read Author's Notes): This happens a few months after the last Ranma manga, and is timeless for Maison Ikkoku.

On with the story... ----- 'Dammit, why couldn't I have just told her the truth?' Ranma thought for the hundredth time. 'All I would have had to do is not DENY that I had told her I loved her... but now that I have she's barely spoken to me... at least not since the morning after that wedding fiasco.'

He sighed and shook his head. At least she walked with him to school in the morning still, even if they never said anything to each other.

But she'd quit walking home with him, instead spending time involved with some student organization- she wouldn't even tell him which one.

Ranma sighed as the bell rang announcing classes were ending for the day. Before the failed wedding, he would have been happy to hear that sound, but now...

Akane approached him as she started to leave class. "I'll be home after my club meeting, okay, Ranma?"

Ranma nodded. She said the same thing every day, and then she disappeared. Once, when his curiosity got the better of him, he tried to follow her and find out what it was she was doing. All that afternoon, he had shadowed her as she approached teacher after teacher- first Ms. Hinako, then the home economics teacher, then the theater teacher, then the dance teacher, and so on. Ranma finally got the hint- that Akane knew she was being followed and wouldn't go do whatever it was she was doing while he was around. For some reason, that worried him greatly- he sometimes wondered if his rejection had sent her searching for another man.

Ranma sighed as he got up to go home. It wasn't as if he had given her any reason to be loyal to him, was it? He shook his head to clear his thoughts, and slowly started walking home. On the way out the door, he bumped into someone, and, without looking to see who it was, tried to apologize. They just sniffed and walked away- and as Ranma glanced up he realized it was Ukyou.

Ranma sighed again. He'd forgiven his fiancees for bombing the wedding, just as he had forgiven them for destroying his mother's house. They, however, had not forgiven him for even allowing the wedding to get as far as it did.

As he continued his walk home, he began to wonder at his current melancholy. It seemed that, all of a sudden, everything had come to a halt. None of his fiancees, not even Kodachi, had been talking to him much, none of them had tried to see him, and none of them, not even Akane, had tried to cook for him. His long list of enemies had disappeared, as well, it seemed. Kuno had been taken to Hawaii for several months by his father, Mousse had quit attacking him now that Shampoo had quit talking to him, and Ryouga had recently gotten married to Akari and told him that he 'no longer had any real quarrels' with him. Even Hoppo had disappeared (Soun and Genma had captured him and tied him with steel cables to the side of a Japanese rocket delivering an experimental satellite into space, last Ranma had heard).

To put it simply, Ranma had no more friends, no more enemies (who were usually counted among his friends), and nothing to do. His father wasn't even a challenge for him in their sparring sessions any more. Ranma, not for the first time in the past few months, considered asking Soun if he could take in a class to teach. After all, he had nothing better to do.

His thoughts, however, were interrupted as he arrived home, where there was some commotion going on. 'All right!' He smiled. 'Finally, something to do!'

He leapt into the main room, trying to see what was happening, only

to find his father, his mother, and Mr. Tendou all arguing with a young woman who he hadn't seen before. From the pieces of conversation he caught, he knew EXACTLY what was going on.

"...father said I was to be engaged to your son!" the strange woman was saying, pointing at Genma. "And I've been searching for you ever since, Mr. Saotome. Now, where is this son of yours that I am supposed to marry?!"

"I'm sorry," Soun said flatly, "But Ranma has already been spoken for. By an agreement his father and I made many years ago, he and my daughter, Akane, will be married... eventually."

Ranma growled as he approached his father from behind, smacking him on the back of the head. "What's going on, pop? Engage me to yet ANOTHER fiancee you haven't told me about?"

"Honest, Ranma! I don't remember making this one! I'm sure it's some kind of mistake!" Genma sounded sincere.

Ranma blinked. Normally, his father's 'sincere' pleas were lies, but this time didn't seem faked to him. Still... "Ah, come on, pop! You've engaged me to so many girls, it's no surprise you can't keep track of them all!" Genma was insulted, and jumped up, preparing to thrash some manners into his son.

The young woman in question blinked. "Um... excuse me..." Ranma and his father, about to come to blows, stopped in mid-attack and turned their heads to look at her. "Are you Ranma Saotome, the son of Genma Saotome?" Ranma slowly nodded. The woman looked him up and down carefully, making him feel like a piece of meat. "Oh, never mind, then. I'd get disgusted having to wake up every morning to someone as... well, ugly... as you are. I'm not interested any more." Everyone facefaulted as she stood up to leave.

Ranma recovered as she reached the door. "Hey, whadya mean, I'm ugly!?"

The girl turned around and looked Ranma up and down again, frowning. "Well, your body is okay... a little overdeveloped, though. Your hands, though, look mangled a bit, and your face is really battered. And your hair... that's the most ridiculous looking pigtail I've ever seen- your hair isn't really long enough for you to wear that style of hair."

Ranma gawked at this woman. Who in the world was she to just insult him like that? The only person he ever let make such verbal assaults against him were his father and Akane, and his father usually paid for them. "Um, excuse me, but can I have the name of the person who's judging my appearance so harshly?" Ranma blinked. 'Mental note: Kill Kuno when he gets back. I'm starting to speak like him too much.'

The girl seemed amused. "Well, I don't really see why you need to know my name- it's not like we'll be seeing each other ever again. But, okay, I'll tell you who I am. My name is... Akemi. Akemi... Roppongi."

Ranma frowned. 'I've heard that name before... but where?' He looked

Akemi up and down, trying to see if he recognized her. Her long red hair looked familiar, but also didn't seem to fit the rest of her body. Her face was plastered in makeup, making it hard to distinguish any features, but there was something familiar about her eyes. Her breasts (which Ranma never would ADMIT he checked out on any girl but Akane or himself... but that didn't mean he didn't) were smaller than Shampoo's or his own... a little bigger than Akane's, though. No clues there. His eyes kept traveling down her body. An interesting stance... definitely a martial artist's stance, a GOOD martial artists stance, but she didn't seem comfortable with it- as if she hadn't practiced her martial arts skills in quite some time.

"Are you through checking me out?" she asked, clearly annoyed.

Ranma jerked back. "Wha- what? No, that's not it at all! I was just..." He shook his head, not knowing exactly what to say he was doing. "You just seem to look familiar to me, that's all!"

The girl blinked. "I look familiar to you?" She seemed to pause for about a full minute a little nervously, and then laughed. "Oh, come on! That's the WORST come-on line I've ever heard."

"HUH?" Ranma cried, astounded that Akemi had jumped to that conclusion. "I wasn't-"

"RANMA!" A voice cried out behind him. "You aren't actually attempting to flirt with this girl, are you?!" For a moment, out of the corner of his eye, Ranma thought he caught a glimpse of Soun's demon-head.

"WHAT?! No, I was just-" Things were rapidly getting out of hand. If Ranma could just talk to this girl alone, maybe he could figure out where he remembered her from, but with his parents there, people would be yelling at him from all sides... again... and he wouldn't be able to think about what he needed to say.

"Maybe you need to be REMINDED of our agreement with the Tendou's, boy!" Genma said, approaching Ranma from the other side.

"ACK!" Ranma cried out in frustration, not knowing how to get out of this. He quickly turned to the girl. "Look, can we talk somewhere in private? I need to ask you some questions..."

"Oh? And why's that?" Akemi asked, smirking. "I've already told you I'm not interested in you, so why are you pursuing me? I mean, you've already got a fiancee, from what your parents have told me."

Ranma shook his head, dodging a swipe from his father. "Actually, I've got four fiancee's, but it's not that at all. Look, can we discuss WHY I want to talk to you later? I'm kinda busy right now!" He jumped over a sweep sent his way by Soun, spinning so as to throw a flying roundhouse kick to the side of the Tendou patriarch's head.

The girl seemed to consider thing for a moment. Very hesitantly, she began "Do you promise to be completely truthful with any questions I might ask of you? I'm going to want to know your REAL intentions, after all!"

Ranma landed from his kick, spun, and backhanded Genma across the room. "Sure thing."

Akemi smiled. "Good. I'll... come find you tomorrow after your classes have ended. Bye!" She turned and trotted out the door.

"Mmph!" Came Ranma's attempt at a farewell. He was unable to get out more than that muffled cry, however, because of a big hand, belonging to one of his fiancees' parents, covering his mouth while said parent picked him up and slammed him into the ground...

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Akane came home a couple of hours later, humming some tune Ranma didn't recognize. At that point, however, it didn't matter to him WHAT piece of music was running through her head just then, because there was one running through his head just then, too. A funeral dirge. She never reacted well to his getting new fiancees- not even when it wasn't his fault.

"I'm home!" She said cheerily.

"H-hi, Akane," Ranma stuttered. 'Oh, great,' he thought to himself, seeing Akane's expression change from her delightfully cute smile to its much more usual frown, 'Now she KNOWS something is wrong. You knew you couldn't say anything without betraying your nerves, baka, so why'd you even open your mouth?'

"Ranma?" Akane asked, concerned. "What's wrong?" She seemed to study his face for a moment. "I've only seen you look that nervous when a new fiancee has popped up..."

'Oh, god! How did she guess that?' Ranma's face went ashen.

Akane blinked. "Uh... DID another fiancee show up?" Ranma, knowing he was doomed, simply nodded. "And what did you do when she did, exactly?" Her voice was stern, commanding. Ranma couldn't answer her, however.

Soun, however, could. "He asked her out on a date!" he cried unpleasantly.

"A DATE?!" Akane screamed. Suddenly, the ever-present mallet was in her hands.

'One of these days, I'll have to find out where she gets that thing from,' Ranma thought, awaiting the pummeling.

"Just who is this girl, Ranma, and why'd you ask her out on this date?" Akane grilled. "Your life hangs on your answer!"

"I-I don't know who she is!" Ranma said, petrified. "She said her name was Akemi Roppongi... and I didn't ask her on a date, or anything, I just asked if I could talk to her privately to find out who she was!"

"Oh, really?" Akane menaced, advancing on Ranma. "For some reason, I don't believe you..."

"But I... I... oh, never mind. You just don't respect me enough to believe any word I say, anyway. If I DO say something, you'll either take it the wrong way or tell me I'm lying and hit me anyway. Go ahead..." He bowed his head, preparing for the blow. "Hit me."

That blow never came. Ranma looked back up at Akane, who seemed to have stopped dead still. Her hands were clenched to some degree, as if to still holding the mallet handle, but for some reason the mallet seemed to have disappeared. Ranma searched the floor briefly, and didn't see it anywhere. 'Huh... I've REALLY got to find out how she does that...'

Then Ranma noticed something in the corner of her eyes which truly terrified him. "A... Akane? Are you crying?" Gods, what had he said?

"RANMA!" Soun shouted. "HOW DARE YOU MAKE MY DAUGHTER CR-" Ranma interrupted him by putting him away, not even bothering to look at him. Right now, all that could hold his attention was the crying girl in front of him.

"Ranma..." Akane began, one tear slowly rolling down the side of her cheek. "Does it really seem like I... like I don't respect you? I mean, is that why you didn't-"

Ranma couldn't deal with it. Akane was crying, and because of him. Because of something he said. Dammit, why did he keep sticking his foot in his mouth? Well... now that he had, maybe he should try talking this out.

"Stop this, Akane," Ranma interrupted. Akane stopped and sniffed a little. "The truth is... you never seem to trust me, you never seem to believe me, and you never seem to listen to me. So I suppose it DOESN'T seem like you respect me. But that is no reason to cry... I still ca- uh, that is... uh... it doesn't really matter to me."

'Dammit!' Ranma cursed himself, and started staring at his feet. 'Why can't I tell her how I feel. I DO still care for you, Akane... now, why can't I even say that?'

Akane sniffed again. "R... Ranma..." Ranma looked up. "I'm sorry..." This time, it was Akane who started to stare at her own feet. "I... I believe you when you say that your meeting tomorrow with this Akemi... Roppongi? Is it? That your meeting with her is not a date. I trust you with her..." Ranma could only stare at her in shock. "Please forgive me for doubting you..."

With that, she turned and ran off. All Ranma could see, as she left, was a discoloration in the wood at her feet, brought about by a single tear....

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Ranma was headed up the stairs, lost in thought. Akane had taken his assessment VERY hard, hard enough to make him wonder what it was that had upset her so much. Perhaps this was a sign of something- a sign that she WOULD, perhaps, listen to him when he really needed her to. Perhaps he could even explain all of his feelings to her...

Ranma quickly ended that train of thought as he heard voices from around the corner- Akane's and Nabiki's.

"...alk to you about Ranma's latest fiancee..." Akane's voice was saying.

"Oh? What's her name?"

'But she said she trusted me this time!' Ranma cried in his head.

'What is she doing? Why is she asking Nabiki about Akemi?' Ranma briefly considered confronting her about this, but instead decided to see if Nabiki actually knew anything.

"Akemi Roppongi," Akane answered.

There was a brief pause. Ranma began to wonder if he had been discovered when Nabiki finally responded.

"Did you say 'Akemi Roppongi?'" There was another brief pause, perhaps long enough for Akane to nod. Nabiki burst into laughter.

"Akane... *giggle* Um, I don't think you'll need to worry about this 'Akemi Roppongi.' You see, Ms. Roppongi is nothing more than a mmph!" That last word was muffled.

"Shh!" Akane hissed. "Don't say anything here... let's talk in your room. I promised Ranma I would trust him with this one... and... I do, but..."

"But you don't trust HER, right? Well, I don't think you should worry about it, but come on..."

Ranma slowly walked away, smiling sadly to himself. 'Ah, well... Akane, do you even know what it means to trust someone? I can handle this girl myself, and you said you'd trust me with her. Maybe that's why you never even tried to before- maybe you never even knew what trust meant..."

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Ranma yawned as his last class was coming to an end. He glanced at the seat which normally held one of his fiancees, wondering what she was planning to do about his meeting with this Akemi woman. Earlier that day, Akane had left for the 'library' in order to 'study.' Ranma was almost certain she had actually left in order to prepare to spy on him.

The bell rang, and once again Ranma slowly got out of his chair and left the room. He briefly wondered how Akemi would find him, but soon just dropped that line of thought. It was more important that he figure out what he'd say to her when she DID find him.

He rounded the corner and hopped up onto the fence by the canal. Ranma sighed. Ukyou and Shampoo were both still ignoring him, Akane STILL didn't trust him (and, he suspected, was spying on him at that moment), and now someone else had entered his life, also theoretically engaged to him but not too happy about it.

'When is my life going to settle down?' Ranma wondered. 'What do I ha-'

"Hey, Ranma Saotome!" The feminine shout of Akemi Roppongi broke into his thoughts. Ranma turned his head to see the redhead woman staggering towards him from the corner he had just come from. "There you are. Hey, why 're ya walkin' up on that fence?" She slurred.

Ranma blinked at her. "Uh... it's balance training. What's with you? You weren't acting this way last night..."

"Bah... just took a little drink while waiting for ya... wanna sip?"

Ranma shied away from the silver flask she offered him. "Uh... sorry, it would affect my balance training. You shouldn't drink that stuff, either... I mean, you are a martial artist, aren't you?"

Akemi blinked. "I am? I didn't think I was..." She seemed to consider what he said for a minute. "Nope... that sounds like something I would remember... I'm definitely not a martial artist, that's for sure..."

Ranma frowned, leaping down from the fence. "Huh... I was sure..." He shook his head. "Well, remind me to give you a free lesson or two, some time. You seem to carry yourself like one."

"Well, where 're ya takin' me on this date, anyway?" Akemi started to loop her arm around Ranma's.

"HEY!" Ranma shouted, leaping away from her. "Let's get one thing straight: This is NOT a date."

"Isn't it? I mean, you're taking me out, to get to know me better. And you're a man, I'm a woman... sounds just like a first date to me... what would you call it?"

"NOT a date. I made a promise to my fiancee that this wasn't a date, and I never intended for it to be one..." Ranma sighed. "Look, another thing about first dates is that there has to be some interest on at least one side for the other... you said you weren't interested in me, and I'm not interested in you- especially not after you show up here DRUNK."

Akemi huffed, and leaned in towards him. "Why aren't ya interested in me? I mean, aren't I attractive enough?"

Ranma shrugged. "You look fine... but so do all of my fiancees. Appearance means nothing to me..." Ranma smirked. "I mean, whether you're a 'sexless uncute tomboy with the strength of a gorilla,' or an Amazon who all-too-obviously isn't wearing a bra, chances are the way you look isn't going to attract me to you."

"Huh? What does that mean?" Akemi asked, bewildered.

"Oh, that's right," Ranma chuckled. "You don't know... that's how I describe a couple of my fiancee's. The Amazon is... well, any man's fantasy, but she's still trying to learn my language, and she's so ANNOYING..." He started walking, and Akemi started following him. "She keeps just CLINGING to me, and I can't push her away..." He shook his head. "The other one, the tomboy... well, I tend to tease her a lot, calling her 'sexless' and 'uncute,' but she really doesn't

look that bad."

"That doesn't seem very nice..."

Ranma laughed. "No, I suppose it isn't. I do it more to keep our parents off our backs than anything- they're always trying to get us engaged, or whatever. I DO try to make it up to her... I can't apologize, or anything, but I CAN let her get her revenge on me, when she wants- she frequently bashes me over the head with things... though recently the only thing she's been using is this glowing mallet she gets out of nowhere. Anyway, I save her life about once ever month or so... not that she appreciates it, mind you, but I figure that's fair..."

Akemi blinked. "Every month or so? Why, exactly, does she keep getting into so much trouble?"

"Well..." Ranma hesitated, leading Akemi towards a coffee shop. "I promised to be truthful, didn't I? Well, partly because of me. Actually, largely because of me. That's why I figure it's fair that she never appreciates it when I DO save her life."

"YOU?" She squeaked.

"Well, people are always coming by, trying to kill me or to marry me. This is largely my father's fault, but because of the way I deal with them, the people... close to me tend to get caught up in the battles I fight." He turned and ordered two cups of coffee and a couple of sandwiches, and then turned his attention back to Akemi. "Sometimes, I don't think I should be held responsible for half the stuff that goes on around here, but since everyone blames me for it all, I must be responsible for most of it, right?"

"Well... not necessarily..." Ranma noticed Akemi's voice seemed to have changed quite a bit- probably because she'd sobered up, he reasoned, but there seemed to be something odd about that voice, too... something he couldn't put his finger on. "Most people need a scapegoat, and you probably are a tempting target, since you're involved in so much of it..."

Ranma sighed. "Yeah, well... doesn't help me feel any less guilty."

They were quiet for a time, but then Akemi took it upon herself to break the silence. "So... why'd ya bring me here? What'd ya wanna talk about?"

Ranma frowned. Her voice once more had that drunken slur, but she had sounded completely sober a minute before... He dismissed it, though, as unimportant.

"Well, actually, we've been talking about it... see, each of the people who have come into my life claiming to be my fiancee have... eventually... become my friend. They are, in fact, the only people who I can consider my friends who are not also trying to kill me most of the time. At the moment, all of my fiancee's are mad at me for one reason or another, and so I haven't got anyone to talk to anymore." Ranma shook his head sadly. "Actually, I've never had anyone I could talk with about my... deeper... feelings. However, you've said that you have NO interest in me. So I was wondering..." Ranma started

struggling to get words out. "Would you... be my... friend?"

Akemi blinked. "Your friend?"

"Well... the only reason you broke our arranged engagement was because you didn't find me attractive- which is fine, there are plenty of women who do, and I don't need another one. But... well, you're a woman... you know how they think, and feel..."

"And I might be able to help you out with some of your problems," she finished for him. "Well... maybe." She looked up at him. "So... what are your problems? I mean, I know you've got several fiancees, but why do you keep them? Do you love any of them? Or perhaps ALL of them?"

"Well... I suppose I promised to be truthful, didn't I?" Akemi nodded, and Ranma sighed. "Okay... I guess I'd better tell you the truth, then. I have two reasons for wanting to keep all my fiancees. The first is, I suppose, selfish... but it's not that bad of a reason. They are my friends, and choosing among them would send them all at each others' throats... and would get them REAL mad at me. I ALMOST married one of them AGAINST MY WILL, and now the others aren't speaking to me."

Akemi waited for a moment, and then shrugged. "I suppose that's not too bad a reason... but you mentioned another one?"

Ranma looked down. "The other one... is perhaps a VERY bad reason. I know I shouldn't use them this way, but... knowing I shouldn't do something and not doing it are two different things. I... use them to boost my ego. Having so many girls chasing after me is-"

Ranma was cut off by a hard slap, delivered powerfully by Akemi's right hand. Ranma could tell, from that slap, that the girl had some martial arts training, regardless of what she claimed, but was too stunned to ask her about it. He looked up at her in confusion.

"How DARE you treat us with such... utter... callousness! I can't believe-"

Ranma blinked. "Us?"

Akemi stopped, staring at Ranma hard for a long moment. "Us meaning 'women.' Have you NO respect for women at all?"

"Well of course I do! I'm just... completely uncertain about how to deal with them." He sighed. "I wouldn't give a damn about how losing them effected my ego if it wasn't for the fact that losing them would also mean the loss of their friendship. Right now, I think I HAVE lost their friendship, and so desperately want to recover at least that much of our relationships."

Akemi shook her head. "You know, until I heard that, I was willing to be your friend, and to help you out with all of this, but now..."

Ranma looked at her desperately. "Please! I'm sorry... I know I have been acting stupidly..." He closed his eyes, and rested his forehead on his hands. "If I could just figure out how to get myself out of this mess I'm in, then..."

A comforting hand rested itself on his shoulder and squeezed. "Hey, I didn't say I WOULDN'T help," Akemi's voice said.

Ranma opened his eyes and looked up at the now standing girl, and immediately tried breaking out of her grasp. "Huh? Why are you touching me? Did Akane see you?! Oh, god, I'm dead when I get home..."

Akemi laughed. "Oh, now THAT'S funny... Who is this 'Akane'?"

Ranma settled down a bit, and sat back in his chair. "One of my fiancees. The one who's family I live with, in fact. She violently pounds me over the head if I seem to be getting too familiar with other girls- even those I'm not interested in."

Akemi frowned. "Hmm... any reason to think she might see you now?"

Ranma's lips twitched into a slight smile. "Well, other than an uncanny ability to walk in on the most compromising situations, I wouldn't be surprised if she had followed me today. She promised me she would trust me, but then I heard her trying to find out information about you..."

Akemi's eyes widened. "Uh... are we safe to talk here?"

Ranma shrugged. "I dunno. If she's listening in, she's listening in. I wouldn't worry about it- this place is as private as it gets for me."

Akemi sat back down in her chair, and sighed. "Well... well... I guess it's okay, if you're comfortable with it." She shrugged. "Anyway... I told you I might help you after all, right?" Ranma nodded. "Okay, well... I need to know some things. First, how do you feel about all your fiancees? And remember, you promised to be truthful."

"Well... there's no problem being truthful about this to YOU... I mean, you don't care who I end up with, right?" Akemi slowly nodded. "Good. So... where to begin..."

"How about with the person I'm least confused about to most confused?" Akemi suggested.

Ranma shrugged. "That's as good a plan as any. Okay, who am I LEAST confused about... that's gotta be Kodachi. No question there, I don't like her. I don't want her near me. I don't want her as a friend. I don't want to ever have to see her again. I wish I'd never met her. I want her dead... or at least committed to the insane asylum, where she belongs."

Akemi laughed. "Methinks he doth protest too much..."

Ranma shook his head. "Are you kidding? She's nuts! She's poisoned me a few times, blackmailed me, threatened my life and the life of my friends... no, I care nothing for her." He shrugged. "No doubt about that." Akemi took on a serious look and gestured for Ranma to go on. "Next would have to be Ucchan... er, Ukyou."

"Who's she?" Akemi asked as the coffee and sandwiches Ranma had ordered arrived.

"She's a childhood friend... dresses as a man most of the time, but still looks very cute. Thing is, though... I just can't think of her THAT way. I first met her when I was about six, and then I thought she was a boy. I mean, she dressed like a boy even then, and she had a boy's name, and acted like a boy... I never knew she was a girl until she showed up, claiming to be my fiancee, ten years later. I think of her... well, not as a sister, but as a... younger brother."

Akemi laughed. "A brother? A BROTHER?!" He laughing grew more hysterical, and for a moment Ranma feared that she had developed Kodachi's syndrome (though her laugh was definitely a lot more pleasant). After she had calmed down, she took a sip of her coffee and looked at Ranma again. "So, what about the others? How about this 'Amazon?'"

Ranma shrugged. "Shampoo? Well... I guess she's all right. I like her as a friend- though not as close a friend as... Ukyou. She doesn't do much of anything to make me dislike her, other than a couple of times when she tried to use hypnosis or another form of mild mind control to try and influence me to marry her. Not that she uses it as often as people at my school tell it in stories about me, but just the two or three times I can think of is often enough to turn me off of her. She's also WAY too clingy for my tastes- jumps on me, doesn't let go... she wouldn't be so bad, if she weren't so absolutely annoying." He shrugged. "I know I don't love her, though. At one point, a magical item known as the 'reversal jewel' caused her to turn all of her love for me into hate. I heard from someone that the best way to break her out of the spell she was under was to tell her that I love her myself... and so I started to, not realizing that this was just another set-up to trick me into marrying her. It didn't work, though, because I just couldn't bring myself to do it."

Akemi took a bite of her sandwich, and nodded. "Okay, that sounds like decent reasoning. What about this... 'Akane?'"

Ranma sighed and shook his head. "Akane? Well... I hate Akane-"

He broke off as Akemi started coughing and choking on her sandwich. Ranma immediately leaped up, and was about to jump to give her the heimliche maneuver when she raised a hand and waved him off. "So..." Akemi croaked weakly. "You... hate... Akane?"

Ranma blinked. "Um... I didn't get a chance to finish. I hate Akane... sometimes. I love Akane more than life itself... sometimes. I've given up a lot for her, but she rarely notices. I always put my body in the way of danger for her, but she just blames me, or complains that she can take care of herself. She... scares me. She doesn't seem to trust me. She doesn't listen to a word I say... But all these things only happen SOMETIMES. Sometimes, she smiles at me... and it seems like the world stops. Like I need to grasp on to that moment, and never let it go, because that's the most precious moment in the world to me... but she never smiles at me for long, and generally pounds me shortly after she does..."

Ranma's voice trailed off as he noticed tears trailing down Akemi's face, smearing her makeup. "I'm sorry, Ranma..." she said- in Akane's

voice.

"Akane?!" Ranma exclaimed.

"I'm sorry I... scare you so... I'm sorry I make you hate me... I'm sorry... I'm just so SORRY!" She bolted out of the coffee shop, tears streaming down her face as the red wig she was wearing fell off.

Ranma just sat there in shock for another split second before jumping up and speeding off after her. "AKANE, WAIT!" he cried at the top of his lungs, following her as fast as he could. Just as she reached the bridge, he jumped and tackled her, pinning her to the ground underneath him. "Akane, listen to me!"

Akane kept struggling for a moment, but Ranma was very determined and kept her pinned down for once. "Dammit, Ranma... let me go... I can't face you right now."

Ranma sighed, not liking the tears still running down her cheeks in torrents. "Not this time, Akane..." He gently wiped one of her tears away. "I need to talk to you, and I need to talk to you now..."

Akane continued to squirm under his grasp, but finally surrendered, and sighed. "Okay, Ranma... I'm not ready for this, but talk... what do you want to say?"

Ranma shook his head. "Nope- not yet," he said, getting off of her and pulling her up, gently dusting off her dress. "Right now, I want you to promise me something."

Akane blinked. "What?"

He smirked. "Well, I'm still forced to tell you the truth because of that promise I made you- even if I thought you were some girl named 'Akemi' at the time. I want you to promise the same- promise me you'll tell me the truth."

"O-okay..." Akane said shakily.

"Good," Ranma smiled, slowly leading her underneath the bridge for some added privacy. Akane was still looking at him expectantly. Ranma pulled out a handkerchief, dipped a corner of it in the water, and started dabbing at Akane's face, trying to remove the remaining makeup.

She took the damp cloth from him, lightly brushing his fingers as she did. "Thanks..."

Akane continued the job Ranma had started after the both of them had sat down, facing each other. "So..." Ranma began. "Why'd you do it?"

Removing a face eyelash, Akane shrugged. "Well, after you... denied loving me... at the wedding, I got really ticked at you. I decided I'd pull this prank, see, where I'd come in, pretending to be one of those fiancees your father had arranged for you while you were still a baby. I'd then get a look at you, and tell you to never mind, because you were too ugly... You aren't, by the way... it took me

days just to come up with reasons why a girl might NOT find you attractive, because you... are really quite handsome."

"And 'Akemi?'"

"Well, I didn't want you to figure out it was me TOO easily, so I spent weeks creating this new identity... I went to Ms. Hinako to try to get ideas for exactly WHO I should pick out as my character. I went to the home economics teacher to get help with the costume- I had to borrow one of your red wigs, by the way. I went to the theater teacher for lessons in acting and to get a coach in altering my voice, and I went to the dance teacher to learn a new way to walk..."

Ranma smiled a little. "I think you'd have been better off asking the theater teacher for help- you were still walking too much like a martial artist."

Akane didn't react. "The last think I needed to pick out was a name. I was hoping I wouldn't have to give one, but I decided that if I did, I'd let you know I was pulling a prank on you by giving you a name you SHOULD have recognized." She looked him in the face, though she avoided his eyes. "You don't watch Maison Ikkoku, do you?"

Ranma blinked. "Er, should I have?"

"I guess not... I suppose you don't watch much t.v. or read many comic books, do you?" Ranma nodded. "Oh, well... Akemi Roppongi is a character on Maison Ikkoku. A real prankster, who's always getting drunk and stuff-"

"HEY! What was that stuff you were drinking, anyway?" Ranma asked, gesturing to the flask which was hanging from a pocket in her shirt.

"Ginger ale... looks like beer enough to fool you if I needed to pour it, but it wouldn't really get me drunk. I figured you would refuse it, even if I offered." She shrugged. "I was right..."

Ranma frowned. "Okay, so you were trying to play a prank on me... but why did you continue it? Why didn't you tell me after you got back home?"

"Well... to tell you the truth... I was interested in finding out why you had asked 'Akemi' out. I DID think you were just planning to add her to your list of suitors... until you got so upset when you thought I didn't trust you. Then I realized there was something more to what you were hoping to talk to her about, and so I decided to keep our little... meeting." Her complexion paled a bit as another sob wracked through her body. "Now I wish I hadn't... do I really SCARE you?"

Ranma looked at Akane hard. "Akane... promise me you won't run away when I tell you, because I want to explain my answer..." Akane nodded slowly. "Good. Remember how I said I SOMETIMES love you, and SOMETIMES hate you? Well... the hate is for two reasons, really. One is... that I'm being forced into something- even if it IS an engagement to someone... I do sometimes love. The other reason is... fear. I'm constantly afraid that you'll leave me, that I'll do

something stupid which you'll never accept me back for, that every time you say that you wouldn't marry a pervert like me, you really mean it... Akane, you could end a lot of those fears by answering me one question... TRUTHFULLY, as you promised." Akane nodded slowly. "Akane... how do YOU feel about ME?"

Akane looked into his eyes this time... and held them in her own. After nearly a full minute, she started leaning towards him, and slowly, ever so slowly moved her lips upon his.

After breaking from the kiss, Akane leaned back and smiled. Ranma was dazzled, and for once Akane's smile seemed to last long enough for him to draw it in.

"Oh... let's just say I'm NOT 'not interested,' okay?"

----- Author's Notes: Yeah, yeah... I know this isn't really a crossover. I needed to call it one or else the surprise would have been blown, though... Hmm... where this idea came from. I suppose I was just wondering how Ranma would react if one someone engaged to him, who had pursued him for 10+ years (like Ukyou had), came by the dojo, demanding to be married to him... until they met him, and said 'Ugh, never mind. He's too ugly for me to ever want to marry! I'm not interested any more...' and just left. I couldn't just leave it at that, however, and so was GOING to make it into a 'choose-your-favorite-fiancee' fic, but... well, the story writes itself, sometimes, and it didn't write itself that way to me. I'll save that sort of multiple ending story for the 'Ranma\Clue' fusion I'm planning (see my web page for a list and short description of MOST of the fics I plan to write...) or perhaps something else which I haven't even got the rudiments of a plan for, yet. You know, if you people don't understand Akane's reactions enough, e-mail me. If I get enough requests, I just might write a second one, repeating this story from Akane's point of view. You will have to wait a while before that one reaches completion, however, as I want to write a couple other fics first (a couple short fics like this one, and then back to Return of the Sisters). Until next time...

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